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APPLIED PRACTICE AND ACADEMIA: THE TWO GOALS FOR PSYCHOLOGY TRAINING

The links and barriers between applied and academic psychology are a constant theme of interviewees in these pages. Andrew Manley and Jason Codner outline postgraduate training issues and key considerations that you need to address when choosing between these options. They identify current routes to becoming an applied or academic psychologist and highlight the differences and common interests of the two career paths.

Applied Psychology: Training, Funding and Practice

Whether you're navigating your way through your chosen area of psychological study, have already been accepted onto a postgraduate degree programme, or are considering studying at postgraduate level, it's important to think about one basic question: where will it all lead?

The term "*applied psychologist*" is used in a variety of contexts. Our use draws on the eight Society practice areas and this paragraph from the *BPS Generic Professional Practice Guidelines*, published in October 2007 states:

'The professional practice of applied psychologists is underpinned by four key ethical values – Respect, Competence, Responsibility and Integrity – and five core competencies: Assessment, Formulation, Intervention or implementation, Evaluation and research, Communication.'

To practice as a Chartered applied psychologist usually requires one year's relevant work experience in your area of choice, as well as an MSc or a society-approved postgraduate qualification and at least two years, often more, of supervised practice. In addition, except for neuropsychology (where you need to establish professional competence in a related field of applied psychology first) and occupational psychology (which requires an approved MSc and two years supervised experience), the other areas / domains require either a doctorate or a BPS Stage 2 qualification.

The BPS approved postgraduate qualifications for applied psychologists are called Stage 1 and Stage 2.

Stage 1 is equivalent to an MSc in terms of the theory in your chosen field and, like the MSc, may require a mix of coursework and exams as well as a research project.

Stage 2 is usually the supervised practice part and is equivalent to a doctoral level qualification, involving coursework, examinations, a thesis, a viva and, increasingly, an article of sufficient standard for peer reviewed publication. Stage 2 requires meeting the competencies mentioned earlier.

While both stage 1 and stage 2 are usually self-funded, it is sometimes possible to secure a sponsorship or a studentship to cover the fees for stage 2. A few research councils also offer this at stage 1.

Clinical and educational psychology are, at present, the only areas that offer specific accredited doctoral qualifications that lead to Chartership. This route offers the BPS stage 1 and stage 2 in one doctoral package complete with salary, rather than through self-funding, sponsorship, or studentship. Competition for places and even interviews on these courses is extremely high.

An applied psychologist's work will encompass a combination of consultancy, teaching, research, direct client work and supervision. The location and client may differ but applied psychologists use common psychology theories and principles.

Clients can hold unrealistic expectations about what psychologists can provide. Other professionals may also have misconceptions about what psychologists can do: we are not mind readers, psychics or magicians! Thus, one of the big challenges for future applied psychologists is being more proactive in letting others know what psychology can and can't achieve.

Applied psychologists contribute to the public good, can have a flexible career, and contribute to projects with the potential for excellent personal and professional recognition.

Academic Psychology

In contrast to applied practitioners, academic psychologists often have very different professional priorities. The title encompasses a number of different roles, ranging from lecturer or teaching assistant, to post-doctorate researcher.

Academics will often be required to fulfil a mixture of teaching and research, with the ratio depending on the strategies of the institution which employs them. A main consideration for a higher education psychologist is to successfully manage the balance between creating an effective learning environment for his or her students, whilst also meeting the institution's requirements for publishing quality research and securing funding via research grants. Given the current climate in UK higher education, writing successful research grant proposals is rapidly becoming a prerequisite for many academic posts.

Juggling teaching and research might sound like a struggle. But academic life can provide the kind of variety, job satisfaction, and personal and professional development opportunities that fits many aspirations. Most positions in academia (whether lectureships, research-posts, or an amalgam of both) require the candidate to have completed (or be nearing completion of) a PhD. In addition, experience of teaching within higher education is expected, although many institutions offer nationally recognised teaching diplomas that can be achieved in parallel to completing a postgraduate degree or fulfilling an active teaching role.

The Links

Despite the differences between working in academia and the applied setting, psychology professionals in both areas have much to offer one another.

Academic psychologists supplement teaching and research with applied work. This enables them to apply theory to practice. It is also a way of generating additional funding. Consultancy opportunities give academic psychologists the chance to conduct research within real world settings in order to test specific hypotheses. The findings from such research inform the work of applied practitioners.

Applied work equally benefits research and teaching. There's nothing new about links between academics and consultants. Applied practitioners are frequently invited by academic institutions to act as visiting lecturers. Some universities offer sandwich courses, where students complete a period of work experience within the applied setting, thus providing them with an effective mix of traditional teaching and experiential learning.

Ostensibly, the priorities, training requirements, time constraints, and available resources of academic psychologists and applied practitioners will often differ greatly from one another. However, psychologists in both areas increasingly acknowledge and embrace the complementary nature of each other's work. Reciprocity between academia and applied practice can only enhance the contribution each makes to the advancement of psychological thought and application.

Searching and Applying for Jobs

While it may be necessary to limit your search given the high level of competition for some positions, you should be flexible when looking for employment; for example by searching further afield in terms of both the geographical location and the explicit focus of the job, you are likely to vastly enhance your chances.

If you are looking for jobs outside of the usual psychology graduate routes, keep in mind transferable skills you have picked up, which are valued by employers. These include experience in critical analysis, synthesis, and problem solving, as well as :

Communication: Both Oral and written (e.g., presentations, reports), exhibiting good listening skills.

Numeracy: Statistical and data handling, interpretation.

Organisational: Working independently and as part of a team, using initiative, managing your time effectively.

Interpersonal: Motivating others, being flexible and adaptable.

Research: Design, implementation and evaluation as investigator, experience as participant.

Information Technology: Familiarity and use of a range of technologies and software.

Psychological knowledge is only one of the things you learn during psychological training.

When applying for a job and attending an interview, it is important to be mindful of the specific criteria that your future employers are looking for. Provide examples of how **you** match the demands of the job. You can do this by tailoring your CV, application form, and interview responses to the elements outlined in the job specification and describe how your ability and experiences fit within this framework. The successful interview candidate is invariably someone who exhibits such skills. Hopefully, by using some of the above tips and resources, that candidate will be you!

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